

12 Nights of Christmas: Merry's Christmas Ménage

Eve Vaughn

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Chapter One

“Merry.” She heard the soft whisper of her name before trying to turn around. “No. Stay where you are. I want you just like this.”

She turned her head to see Thorne walking toward her with the stealth of a jungle cat. For someone so large, he moved with a grace that made it seem as though he were gliding across the room.

Merry’s breath caught in her throat when he stopped mere inches behind her. She could smell a hint of his tangy cologne, Cool Water. She loved everything about this man. His proximity wreaked havoc with her equilibrium.

Thorne’s hands gripped her shoulders, pulling her against his taut body. She stiffened. What was the meaning of this? He’d never so much as looked at her when he was engrossed in his work. That he was holding her now was a bit of a shock, though not unwelcome.

“Relax, Merry. I won’t bite... unless you want me to.”

“Mr. Mordeaux --”

“Thorne. I’ve already told you to call me by my first name.”

“But --”

“No buts, Merry. Say my name.”

She already thought of him as Thorne in her mind, so why not say it?

Because it was a line she was afraid to cross.

His grip tightened on her shoulders as he lowered his head. His warm breath tickled her skin, sending sparks of pleasure through the core of her being. Merry had wanted this gorgeous man from the moment she’d laid eyes on him. Thorne Mordeaux oozed sexuality, with a tall, powerfully built frame and a set of shoulders so broad she dreamed of resting her head on them.

He had a nice tight ass, which she often watched when he walked past her. Thorne could wear the hell out of some Levi's. His face was just as arresting, with a long straight nose and midnight brows slashed over eyes so pale a blue at times they almost appeared platinum. The dark and the light were such a startling contrast that his gaze had a hypnotic effect.

His lips, though thin, were well shaped, made for kissing. Many carnal thoughts sprang to mind when she looked at his mouth and wondered what it would feel like on hers. She loved the way the unruly waves of his black hair rested on his scalp in a constant state of disarray. It was neither long nor short, just touching the edge of his collar.

He was gorgeous. And out of her league.

Thorne lowered his hands until they cupped her breasts. Merry gasped. "Mr. Mord --"

"Thorne," he whispered, kissing the nape of her neck.

"Thorne," she sighed, leaning against his hard body. A wave of pure desire rushed through her.

"You have no idea how much I've wanted you, Merry."

"So why didn't you ever say anything?" she asked, finding it hard to get the words out when he squeezed her aching mounds in his palms. She felt a tingling between her thighs and squirmed to temper the burning heat within.

"Because I wasn't sure how you'd react." His tongue slid over the shell of her ear and Merry thought she'd explode any second now. She turned around to press her tight breasts against his chest.

"I don't know why you would think I wouldn't want you. I've... I've wanted you for a long time too." Merry cupped the back of Thorne's neck. Her body awakened when he lowered his head to kiss her. She opened her mouth under the insistent pressure of his tongue initiating its seductive dance.

Merry ground her body against his, wanting to be closer. His hands slid down her back until they reached the curves of her ass, squeezing and molding them with his

hands. She reveled in his touch, her body on fire for him. It was finally happening. After two months of daydreaming and fantasizing, Merry was in Thorne's arms.

He lifted his head with a soft groan, looking down at her with pale, lust-filled eyes. "You're beautiful, Merry. You have no idea how hard it's been watching you in this house and not being able to touch you -- to tell you how I feel."

She gasped. "How long?"

"I think from the beginning."

Merry shook her head. "But... I'm not beautiful."

"You are to me, and I want you."

She was on the verge of responding to Thorne's declaration when a shrill buzz sliced through the air. "What?" she asked, suddenly feeling disoriented and drowsy, the ringing cutting through her subconscious.

Reluctantly, Merry opened her eyes only to discover it was all a dream.

Damn.

She pulled herself into a sitting position on quivering arms, a heaviness falling over her heart. Of course it was a dream. Men like Thorne Mordeaux didn't want women like her. Throwing the covers off and swinging her legs over the side of the bed, Merry slid her cold toes into warm fuzzy bunny slippers.

The flames in the bedroom fireplace had long since died out while she slept, the chill of the drafty room seeping through her flannel nightgown. It took a moment for Merry to gather her bearings before she got out of bed and walked to her private bathroom.

Turning on the sink, she cupped her hands beneath the cool streaming water and splashed it over her face, its crisp sting fully rousing her. Merry examined herself in the mirror, seeing the same nondescript face she'd grown used to over the years.

It was wishful thinking on her part to even entertain sinful thoughts about her sexy employer. He was hot, and she was just a fat lump. Large, dark, thickly lashed brown eyes stared back at her, unblinking. Merry supposed they were her best feature, having been complimented on them before. Other than her eyes, there wasn't anything

spectacular about her appearance -- a nose just a shade too broad and two-toned lips neither full nor thin.

Thankfully she had nice skin, which was a rich dark brown with red undertones and blemish free. She ran her fingers through short tight curls that just touched the tips of her ears. Her body was another story. Merry was definitely not a Tyra. She was more of an Oprah, and not the rich one either. She was more of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *The Color Purple* Oprah.

Merry had struggled with her weight since she hit puberty. Her wide hips, thick thighs, a belly that stuck out a little further than it should, and triple D breasts had long since been the bane of her existence. She generally wore oversized clothes to cover the many trouble spots on her plump body.

No.

There was definitely no way that a hottie like Thorne would want her. He was not only gorgeous but rich, smart, and could have any woman he set those dreamy eyes on. She was just thankful that he'd taken her in as his housekeeper when she'd had no other place to go.

Christmas would be here a week from today, and the thought depressed her. Her only remaining family was a sister who was probably living it up on some Caribbean island, running through the money from the sale of their childhood home. Not for the first time Merry wished she could be more like her beautiful sister, Valentine.

Sure Val never thought of anyone but herself, but if Merry were a little more selfish, she wouldn't have ended up in such dire straits. Shortly after Merry graduated high school, their mother, who had been struggling with MS for years, took a turn for the worse. Merry had given up her scholarship to take care of her ailing parent, devoting the past seven years of her life to the often verbally abusive invalid.

Valentine, of course, flitted in and out of their lives as she pleased and only stuck around long enough to get what she'd come for. It tore Merry up when Mama would always welcome her errant daughter with open arms, even mortgaging the house once

when Valentine had gotten into some financial difficulties. Merry never did understand why the prodigal child always got preferential treatment, but it was the story of her life.

Her sister could do no wrong while Merry was just an afterthought. She speculated that her mother treated them so differently because Valentine took after her in looks, while Merry took after her father who'd run off on them when she was ten. Their mother's preference was made clear at the reading of the will when Valentine had been left with everything from the house to the insurance policy.

To add insult to injury, Valentine had informed Merry that she had a month to find a place to live because she was selling the house. With no work experience besides a brief stint at a fast food restaurant in her teens, Merry didn't have many options. Seeing the ad for a live-in housekeeper had been a godsend.

It had been an even bigger surprise to find her prospective employer was none other than Thorne Mordeaux, best-selling author of the sexy, fast paced thrillers she read every chance she got.

He had a reputation for being a recluse. His picture wasn't even on the inside of his book covers. Merry had figured it was because he was ugly, but that definitely wasn't the case. Whenever he was near, her heart would beat like crazy, but he treated her with the courtesy of an employer and, while friendly, he didn't give much away.

These past two months working for him were slowly driving her nuts, but she had to keep things in perspective. He was her employer, and she was nothing to him but a housekeeper.

* * *

Thorne raised his head when he heard a light knock on the study door. Stealing a glance at the clock on his large oak desk, he realized it was seven-thirty in the morning and he had yet to go to bed.

"Come in," he said, knowing that it was Merry on the other side.

His heart sped up when she entered, a shy smile on those sexy lips of hers. How many times had he fantasized about nibbling and tasting them?

"Good morning, Mr. Mordeaux," she greeted him, walking into the room with a tray in her hand. Like clockwork, she always appeared with his morning coffee at this time. She placed the tray on the desk and prepared his morning java the way he liked it, black with one teaspoon of sugar.

Thorne enjoyed these moments because this was when he could watch her unguarded. From the moment he'd laid eyes on Merry, he wanted her, although he didn't know what it was about this particular woman that drove him to distraction.

Was it her large doe-like eyes that looked at him so innocently when she spoke? Was it the sweet dulcet tones of her voice that sent shivers of lust down his spine? Was it the innate goodness that seemed to create an invisible force around her? Or could it be her full, voluptuous body that made his cock stir whenever she drew near?

Maybe it was all those things, but no matter. He had to tread carefully with her. She gave him no indication that she was interested. She still called him Mr. Mordeaux even though he'd told her to call him Thorne. Whenever he would try to strike up a conversation with her, Merry would shut him down. Perhaps she didn't like white men. Where he came from things like skin color didn't matter.

Thorne's heart twisted when he thought of home. It had been five years since he'd left Sayrea, and though he'd had plenty of time to heal, he wondered what Merry would think of his homeland and how she would react if she knew his secret.

She handed him the cup of coffee. "Here you go, Mr. Mordeaux. Will you be needing anything else?"

Just you, he wanted to say, but smiled instead. "No. That will be it."

Merry seemed to hesitate, but then straightened and nodded.

"Umm, Merry?"

"Yes?"

"Christmas is coming up. Do you need any time off? I'm sorry, it just occurred to me."

Merry looked away, an uneasy expression on her face. "No. I, uh, don't have any plans."

Maybe this would be the time to make his move with her, but would she be receptive to him?

Chapter Two

Thorne was exhausted. Thank goodness his manuscript was complete. If he had to spend another night like the one before, he'd crash and burn. Mailing off the book to his agent filled him with a sense of relief. Driving home from the post office, he decided he could relax until he received the first round of edits. In the meantime, he could concentrate on getting into Merry's good graces.

Damn, she was frustrating. She gave so little of herself away. When he'd asked her about Christmas plans, she'd answered politely enough but then seemed to shut down. What would it take to get through to her?

In Merry he sensed a kind, gentle soul that needed nurturing -- it made him feel protective toward her. When she was near, Thorne wanted to wrap his arms around her and not let go. It had been so long since he'd felt this way about a woman.

After Melani's death, he didn't think he could ever love again, so it surprised him that he could feel this instant sexual pull for the shy, sweet Merry. When he was interviewing potential housekeepers to replace the one who'd left, he wanted an older woman who wouldn't get in his way. When he saw Merry, however, all bets were off. He had to keep her close at all costs.

Now the problem was making her aware of him as something more than an employer. It would take a Christmas miracle, but he had to try.

Thorne turned his Yukon down his long narrow drive, his thoughts still on Merry. A red Ferrari Testarossa was parked in front of his house, the shiny paint job glistening against rays of the dull December sunshine.

His heart seized up. There was only one person he knew who drove a car that flashy. Dax. What the hell was he doing here? And how long had he been here, alone with Merry?

Thorne glanced at his watch, realizing he'd been gone for nearly two hours. The thought of Dax charming his housekeeper didn't sit well with him, especially when their Darwaedd traditions came to mind.

He hurried to park his vehicle, wasting no time getting out. His feet pounded against the cobblestone driveway as he raced to get inside his Georgian style mansion. The sound of feminine laughter filtered to his ears the second his foot crossed the threshold. It was a happy, light, and sexy sound, one he'd never heard before -- Merry's laugh.

A burst of jealousy, dark and painful, tore through his body. She'd never laughed for him like that, yet she did for his brother who she'd known for less than a couple of hours. Thorne quietly closed the door, taking a deep breath in order to calm down. It wouldn't be a good idea to go charging through the house like a jealous lover.

Instead he took his time, pacing himself as he made his way to the living room. He didn't bother to take in the sights of Christmas displayed so prominently on the walls.

Not knowing why, he halted before joining Merry and Dax in the living room. Maybe it was so he could hear that unguarded laughter once more, or just to know if it was already too late for him.

"So Merry," Dax's deep voice boomed through the room. "Your name is very appropriate for the season. Is that just a coincidence?"

"I was named for the holiday actually. My full name is Merry Christmas Holiday. My parents weren't hippies, they just had a perverse sense of humor when they named my sister and me."

"And your sister's name?"

"Valentine Heart Holiday."

Dax laughed, and Thorne's fists clenched and unclenched. To hear Merry talk so openly with his brother pushed him further down his jealous path, especially since this was information she hadn't bothered to share with him.

"Were you teased as a child?"

"Things weren't so bad until the kids learned my middle name. Yikes. It's been the bane of my existence ever since," she groaned.

"I think it suits you."

There was a brief silence before Merry spoke again. "Well, I need to start lunch. Mr. Mordeaux prefers to eat by noon."

Dax laughed. "Mr. Mordeaux? Please tell me Thorne doesn't make you call him that?"

Another silence followed. "Well... uh... I... he's my employer."

"Hmm, I've never known my brother to be so formal. How strange."

"Oh, it's my preference really. You know what they say, familiarity breeds contempt. Okay, now I have to get back to work. If you need anything, just holler. I'm sure your brother will be thrilled to see you when he gets back."

Familiarity breeds contempt? Where the hell did she get that from? That certainly sent him a message, but it wasn't the one he'd been looking for. Was the situation hopeless before he even tried?

Merry walked out of the living room, nearly running into him before he could react. The smell of her sweet perfume drifted to his nostrils and his cock twitched in reaction.

"Mr. Mordeaux!" Her eyes widened with apparent surprise. "I didn't hear you come in. Your brother is here. I've fixed up a bedroom for him. I put him in the blue room. I hope you don't mind"

Thorne covered the front of his pants with his jacket, trying to hide the fact that he was hard as a rock. "Sure, that's fine. I hope my brother didn't inconvenience you."

"Dax? Not at all. He's great." She gifted him with one of her rare smiles and the jealous demon within reared its head once more.

"Dax? That's very casual of you, don't you think, Merry?"

When her smile fell and her face flushed, Thorne knew he'd screwed up. "I'm sorry. You're right of course. I'll go see to lunch now. Will you be needing anything else... Mr. Mordeaux?"

He felt like kicking himself. Why had he done that? He should have just left well enough alone. "No, thank you. Merry?"

She cocked her head to the side, an unreadable expression in her dark eyes. "Yes?"

"Never mind."

She shrugged and walked off.

"Little brother, it's been a long time. You look well."

Thorne looked at the man now standing next to him, a near mirror image of himself, the only difference being that Dax had a long, shaggy blond mane. "Dax." Thorne tried to smile, but his lips wouldn't cooperate. As happy as he was to see his older brother after such a long time, he couldn't help but think how easily Merry had laughed and opened up to him.

"Stop being such a tight ass and give me a hug. It's been years, Thorne." He walked into the arms Dax held open for him. Of all the things he missed about Sayrea, it was his brother he'd missed the most.

His arms went around his brother's solid body and tears stung the backs of his eyelids. "It's good to see you, Dax."

"That's more like it." The blond pulled back. "I've missed you. Are you ready to stop living the life of a recluse and take your rightful place as a Prince of Sayrea?"

"I have no place there anymore."

"Yes, you do... *Thanadorius Rolandium*."

"Don't call me by that name. I've left that life behind. I'm tired of the fighting and trying to live up to other people's expectations. Maybe if I'd realized it earlier, Melani would still be alive."

"Why shouldn't I call you by your given name?"

"If you haven't forgotten, Mother also gave us names so that we may live freely in either world. Thorne is the identity I use now... exclusively."

Dax sighed with a shake of his head. "Come, let's sit." He guided Thorne over to a couch on the far end of the large living room. "It wasn't your fault, Thorne."

"Maybe not, but her family seemed to think so."

"They've had a change of heart. Everyone knows you tried to save her. Look, that's beside the point. We've been at peace for a long time now. The human world is nice to visit, but you belong in Sayrea. You are royalty."

"That means less than nothing to me. Have you forgotten that we're half human?"

"Yes, but no matter how much you try to convince yourself otherwise, your heart belongs in Sayrea."

Sayrea was an island just off the coast of northern California. It was a place that was unable to be seen by humans unless they were invited. Many magical islands surrounded them, inhabited by otherworldly beings. Since land was scarce, there was always a constant battle to secure their territory.

The Darwaedd could control the elements, which kept their enemies at bay for the most part. Some Darwaeddians ventured off their islands and lived in the human world, but always returned home. That was how their father, King Deleron, had met their mother, Stella.

When their parents perished in one of Sayrea's many wars, Thorne began to spend more time off the islands but it was Melani's death that had made him stay away. His mother still had property just outside of Seattle in Bellevue. Thorne worked odd jobs, all while working on a novel to submit to an agent. That was five years ago. He'd since written six successful novels, all on bestseller lists, and bought a home far enough away from town so that he wouldn't be disturbed. He preferred the isolation. His only contact with others was his rare trips into town, and his monthly calls to his agent.

And now Merry.

"No, my heart belongs here."

"Is there someone special?"

"I'd rather not talk about it."

A slow smile tilted Dax's lips. "Aww, so there is. Hmm, will I get to meet her?"

"Let it go, Dax. So tell me, what brings you here?" he asked, smoothly changing the subject. He knew his brother was aware of this tactic, but thankfully he didn't comment on it.

"You know I enjoy coming to this side of the world to celebrate the Christmas festivities."

"For someone who is constantly singing the praises of Sayrea, I'm surprised."

"As you pointed out earlier, we are half human. Don't you remember when we were children, Mother would bring us over here to celebrate? Those were happy times."

Thorne smiled in remembrance. "Yes, they were, but you haven't been over here in nearly five years. What's kept you away?"

"I've been negotiating peace among our nations. I thought I would treat myself to a nice holiday. I also need to oversee some of my investments."

Thorne was happy that his brother had come for a visit, but why did it have to be when he'd finally decided to make a play for Merry? As if sensing his discomfort, Dax asked, "Will there be a problem with my staying here through the holiday?"

"Of course not. We can find something to do together in town."

"And do you plan on including your lovely housekeeper?"

Thorne's eyes narrowed. "I would thank you if you didn't get too familiar with the help," he snapped.

"I brought you some hot chocolate," Merry interrupted them.

Thorne raised his head to see Merry standing a few feet away from them, a tray in hand. Her lips were tightly pursed and he knew she'd heard what he'd said.

"Uh, Merry," he began.

She lifted a brow, fixing those fathomless dark eyes in his direction. "Yes?"

What could he say? "Thank you," he finished lamely.

"Your lunch should be ready in twenty minutes. Will there be anything else... Sir?"

The word sir cut him to the quick. Why did his jealousy have to kick in at such an inopportune moment? "No, thank you."

She set the tray on the coffee table and left them alone.

Dax turned to him with a knowing smile on his face. "Smooth move, Thorne. Now I see your reason for wanting to stay here. She seems like a very charming lady."

"Shut up."

* * *

In the kitchen, Merry wiped away an angry tear that raced down her face. Hearing Thorne refer to her so offhandedly as the help seemed to underline the futility of her longing for him. If he wanted things to be strictly business between them, then she'd have to deal with it. Only this would probably be the worst Christmas of her life.

Chapter Three

"Merry, wait up!"

She turned around to see Dax walking toward her just as she was about to head out the door. Lord, he was fine. When God was handing out looks, he was very generous with the Mordeaux brothers. Dax was just as large as Thorne if not a little leaner. The harsh symmetrical lines of his face blended together like a work of art. He had the same pale blue eyes and proud aristocratic nose as his brother.

Except for Dax's long blond, shoulder length hair, they could have been twins. From the short conversation she'd had with him, Merry discovered that she liked Dax very much. He was more laid back and easier to talk to than her employer. She could easily find herself crushing on him, the only problem being that he wasn't Thorne.

Curse her foolish heart.

Merry gave him a wary smile. Since the day before when she'd heard Thorne telling Dax to stay away from "the help," she'd made herself scarce, only showing up to serve meals. Merry had made an excuse not to eat with them when Dax had invited her. "Yes, Mr. Mordeaux, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Mordeaux?" He gave her a funny look, shaking his shaggy mane. "Look, if my brother wants you to call him that then that's between you and him. I'm Dax, got it?" The large, toothy grin he gave her made it difficult for Merry to argue.

"Yes. I got it. Dax."

"Good. So, where are you headed?"

"Oh, there's something I need to pick up at the grocery store and I thought I'd get a couple things for Christmas."

"If you don't mind, I'd love to come with you. Thorne's been in a funk since yesterday and he's brainstorming a new book in his study, which leaves me at loose ends."

"Are you sure? I'm just going to pick up a few things. It won't be terribly exciting."

"Your company will be exciting enough. Besides, I can't stand being cooped up inside for very long."

"I think I'd prefer being inside in front of a nice fireplace." She shivered, wrapping her arms around her body.

"You think so? I barely feel the cold at all." Dax looked up into the now cloudy sky and the clouds moved aside, allowing the sun to come through. "See. It's not so bad."

If she didn't know better, she would have thought he was responsible for the clouds moving, but that was too silly an idea to even entertain. "Well, if you really want to come, I'd love to have you." Merry didn't know why she was so relaxed in his presence, but for some reason she felt a connection to him. Dax followed her as she walked to her old clunker, a 1990 Nissan Sentra. It had been her mother's, so the only reason Merry now owned it was because Valentine didn't want it.

"Let's hope Christine starts."

"Christine?" Dax asked, a puzzled smile on his handsome face.

"You know, after the movie. I named her Christine because she's temperamental. It will take some time to warm her up in this weather though," Merry sighed.

"Won't Thorne lend you one of his vehicles?"

"He's offered, but I'd feel funny accepting, especially when the owner of the vehicle isn't in it with me. It would be pretty hard explaining to the police why I'm driving a car that doesn't belong to me if I were to get pulled over."

"Point taken. Let's take my car then. It runs like a dream."

"Wow! I've never ridden in a Ferrari before. This will be a treat."

"Can you drive a stick?"

"I learned on one. Are you asking because you're going to let me drive your car?" She might not have had a lot of experience with men, but she knew how possessive they were about their cars, especially high performance sports vehicles like this one.

He shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

"Are you serious?"

"Quite. What do you say?" Dax winked at her.

"Hell, yeah. I'm not going to turn down a chance to drive a Ferrari. What are you waiting for? Gimme those keys, buddy." She bounced up and down with an eagerness she hadn't experienced in a while.

He laughed, tossing her the keys before placing his hand on her back guiding her to his car. Merry opened the fire engine red door and slid into the leather bucket seat with a large grin on her face. "Whoa. This is nice."

"I like it." Dax chuckled, sliding in next to her.

"Are you sure I can drive this? This isn't a hoax is it?" Inwardly she crossed her fingers hoping he wouldn't change his mind.

"If I had a problem with you driving, I wouldn't have offered. Now let's go, woman."

Merry laughed, feeling totally at ease with him. The car did indeed run like a dream. If only Valentine could see her now, she'd probably be green with envy. She sighed at the thought of her selfish sister. Merry wished she and her sibling were closer, but from an early age, she'd realized that it was in her best interest to stay out of Valentine's way. That is, of course, unless she wanted to be the butt of cruel jokes and nasty barbs.

"What's wrong, Merry?"

"What?" she asked, looking at him briefly before turning her head back to the road.

"You had a sad look on your face."

"Sad look? I don't know what you're talking about."

"You can be honest with me. Tell me what's on your mind."

"You'd probably be bored."

"If I didn't want to know, I wouldn't have asked."

She sighed. Did she dare open up to this man? If not him, who else could she talk to? It wasn't as though she could share her feelings with Thorne unless she wanted to give away her feelings for him. "I hate Christmas."

"That's too bad. It's one of my favorite holidays, when I have time to celebrate it. It's ironic that someone with your name would feel that way. Why do you hate it?"

"It's supposed to be spent with people you love and who love you, but it's become so commercialized, it seems so soulless."

"You have a point about that, but it's what you make it. Do you have any relatives besides your sister?"

"No, just me and Valentine. We're not close though."

"That's a shame. My brothers are everything to me."

"You have other brothers?"

"Just Thorne and our younger brother, Alix. He's back home taking care of... the family business."

"What's the family business?"

"You can say we oversee things. I'm trying to convince Thorne to come back home and take his rightful place in the business."

The mention of Thorne leaving Bellevue and the thought of never seeing him again upset her and she slammed on the brakes.

"Whoa! Careful." Dax gripped her shoulder.

Fortunately, the only other cars on the road were driving in the other direction. "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me," she said, moving the car forward again.

"Was it the mention of my brother? You two get awful touchy when I bring your names up to each other."

"I think you might be imagining things. Could we change the subject?"

"If you like. Are you planning on working through the holiday? I can't believe Thorne wouldn't give you a few days off at least."

"Actually he said I could take a few days off, but I don't really have any plans besides catching up on some reading and maybe going to a movie. They have a movie theatre in town that plays old films like *Casablanca* and it's supposed to be open on Christmas day. I love those old movies, where men were men and women were women," she finished on a sigh.

He smiled at her. "Ah, so you're a romantic."

"I guess I am."

"I'm surprised you don't have a boyfriend to spend Christmas with."

Merry laughed. "You're funny."

Dax's eyebrows furrowed. "What's so funny?"

"Me? A boyfriend? Hardly. I'm twenty-five and the only boyfriend I've ever had was..." What could she say? That her only boyfriend had been one of Valentine's castoffs, who'd used Merry to get back into her sister's good graces. It was only after she'd trustingly given Terrell her virginity that he'd dropped her like a bad habit.

"*Did you think I wanted someone like you?*" Terrell laughed when she'd told him she loved him. The incident was still upsetting to this day, although it had happened ten years ago.

"What were you about to say?" Dax cut into her thoughts, bringing Merry back to the present.

"Uh, my last boyfriend was in high school."

"I'm surprised you haven't had one since."

"Why is that so hard to believe? I'm no great beauty." She shrugged.

"I never suspected you to suffer from low self-esteem."

"It's not that I have low self-esteem, I'm just a realist. If you've grown up with a sister who looks like a supermodel, you learn to put things into perspective."

"I think you're lovely," Dax said quietly.

Merry laughed. "You're a sweetie pie, but I don't need empty compliments."

"Merry, if we're going to be friends, I'd appreciate you not calling me a liar. I'm not used to having my word doubted." The threatening undertone of his voice made her look at him. He glared at her with pale blue eyes, his lips firmed into a thin line.

She gasped, her face growing hot. "I wasn't calling you a liar."

"Oh, yes, you were and if we weren't in this car, I'd put you over my knee and paddle that luscious bottom of yours until you begged for mercy."

Now she knew he was screwing with her head. "Stop teasing me, Dax."

"I'm not teasing you. I find you very desirable. Where I come from, full figured women are revered. My father adored my mother who happened to be larger than you actually, and she was gorgeous. This equating size with beauty has always puzzled me. I find you very attractive. You have big brown eyes, rich mahogany skin, sexy lips, and gorgeous curves. If that's not beauty, Merry, I don't know what is."

No one had ever told her that before, and his words seemed so sincere that she found it hard to protest. "Thank you, Dax."

"There's nothing to thank me for. You're beautiful, inside and out, and I think any man would be proud to have you."

As kind as his declaration was, there was only one man she wanted to feel that way about her.

* * *

Pent-up rage boiled to the surface, threatening to break free as Thorne paced the floor of his study. They'd been gone for over three hours. Three hours! What the hell could they possibly be up to? What were they talking about? Was Dax putting the moves on Merry? Was she welcoming his advances?

When he'd seen the two of them drive off in Dax's Ferrari, Thorne had to fight back the urge to run outside, pull Merry out of the car, and demand that she stay with him. She was his!

He needed to do something to relieve the burning ache he felt pounding in his groin. With a deep breath, he took a seat behind his desk. Something had to give.

Thorne didn't think he could go much longer without telling her how he felt, but where would he begin when she seemed more distant than ever lately?

He rubbed his crotch, wishing it were Merry's hand touching him. Would she be shy innocence or wanton seductress? Thorne undid his waistband and zipper before easing his cock out. It sprang to attention with the caress of warm air. He grasped it in his fist. Thorne moaned with each stroke.

"Oh, Merry," he whispered, running his thumb over the purplish head of his sensitive dick. A drop of pre-cum leaked from the tip. Thorne closed his eyes and leaned back against the big leather desk chair.

If he pretended hard enough, it was almost as if she were with him now. How he wanted her. He jerked his cock back and forth in his fist, his motions pushing him closer to a sensational peak. "Oh, Merry," he sighed again as he exploded, his seed shooting into his lap and over his hand.

Thorne took deep breaths, trying to calm himself down before reaching for the box of tissues on his desk. Suddenly he heard laughter in the hallway and frantically began to clean himself off. He thrust his now flaccid penis back into his pants, tossed the soiled tissues in the wastebasket, and adjusted his clothing.

He followed the direction of the laughter and halted just in time to see Dax lean over Merry and give her a kiss on the cheek.

Merry looked up at his brother with a huge smile on her face. "You're such a sweetheart, Dax. Thanks for coming out with me today. I can't remember when I've had more fun."

Thorne wanted to kill them both.

Chapter Four

"What the hell is going on here?" Thorne demanded.

Dax and Merry jumped apart as though they'd both been caught with their hands in the proverbial cookie jar. "Relax, little brother. We were just talking." Dax shot him a lazy grin.

Thorne wanted to punch him.

His eyes drifted to Merry's flushed face, her eyes wide. "Um, I... we just went to pick up a few things in town," she stammered, sounding guilty as hell.

"Don't you have some work to do here? It's what you're being paid for, isn't it?" Thorne snapped. The minute those words spewed from his mouth, he realized that he'd made yet another mistake.

Merry's mouth gaped open and shut like a fish on a hook. "Of course, Mr. Mordeaux." She squared her shoulders and lifted her chin before marching off, back stiff.

Dax's eyes turned from pale blue to dark silver. "What the hell is wrong with you? She didn't deserve that."

Thorne leaned against the wall, closing his eyes to shut out Dax's stormy face. "You're right. She didn't."

"Then why did you do it? And for that matter, why do you treat her the way you do? Granted she's your employee, but it doesn't mean she has no feelings."

"Dax, I don't need a lecture. Don't you think I know how out of line that comment was? Damn. I always manage to say the wrong things around her," he groaned.

"Don't know what to say? Are you serious?" To Thorne's annoyance, Dax broke out into peals of body-shaking laughter.

"I fail to see what's so damn funny."

"You are. You have a thing for Merry and it's making you act like an idiot."

Thorne glared, using every ounce of his willpower not to smash Dax in the face.

"And if I do?"

"If you do, snapping at her all the time isn't going to win her over."

"Fine."

A brief pause followed. "You were evasive when I asked earlier, but be honest with me now. Is Merry the reason you've been in a foul mood since I've been here?"

"I have not been in a foul mood. I -- shit. Does it really show?"

"Just a little, but I'm your brother and I know these things. She's a nice lady. I approve. She'd make a fine princess for you."

"Let's not go that far yet. First of all, she doesn't know about my other identity, and second, I wish you would stop bringing that up."

"Why? It's who you are."

"I'm Thorne Mordeaux. That's who I am."

"If you care for this woman, you're going to have to come clean, and if you don't, I will. You have until Christmas day."

"That's blackmail. She'd quit for sure."

"If she runs away because of that then she doesn't deserve you, but I think Merry will surprise you."

"Give me some time."

"How long has she been your employee?"

"Two months."

"And how long have you had these feelings for her?"

Thorne crossed his arms, pursing her lips. "You need to mind your own damn business."

"As your older brother and your king, you are my business." Dax placed his hand on Thorne's shoulder. "You know I love you very much. You and Alix are all I

have left, and your happiness is very important to me. If Merry is the key to that happiness then be warned; I'm going to do what I can to ensure it."

Thorne's heart sped up. Surely Dax wasn't implying what he thought. "You don't mean..."

"Thorne, if she's the right one, she'll need to accept you for who you are... and our traditions."

"No. Not that."

"It's our way. You may have turned your back on our customs, but I haven't. Like I said, you have until Christmas," Dax warned before leaving him alone standing in the middle of the hallway.

* * *

Merry pulled the roast from the oven with a heavy sigh. Thorne had been acting like an ogre for the past couple days. She'd put up with too many years of her mother's verbal abuse to put up with this shit. Who did he think she was? Hazel? Florence? Well, he had another think coming.

The next time he talked down to her, she would tell him what she thought about his condescension, even if it did cost her job. She'd at least have her self-respect.

Crap. Why did her body grow hot whenever he was near? She didn't want to feel like this when Thorne clearly thought so little of her.

Her mind drifted to her day with Dax. They'd had a great time shopping. She found him funny, interesting, and a good listener. Merry couldn't help but think how handsome he was. The more time they'd spent together, the more attracted she became to him. Perhaps her draw to him was the strong resemblance to Thorne.

"Merry, can we talk?"

She shrieked with a start and turned around to see Thorne standing in the kitchen doorway. "Jesus Christ. Tho -- Mr. Mordeaux, you scared the crap out of me."

He walked further into the kitchen, stopping right in front of her. Merry took a step back, craning her neck to look into his eyes. She gulped.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. Merry, you were about to call me by my first name, weren't you?"

Was he trying to put her in her place again? "A slip of the tongue," she said through clenched teeth.

"It's okay. Actually, I really wish you would call me Thorne. There's never been a need to be so formal." This definitely took her by surprise. "You call my brother Dax. Why can't you call me Thorne?" He took another step forward and she took one more back, not knowing if this was some trap.

"I don't really think it would be appropriate."

"Why?"

Merry placed her hands on her hips. "Well, you've spent the past couple days reminding me how I'm just the 'help' around here."

"I've done no such thing."

"Oh, didn't you? At the risk of being insubordinate, I beg to differ. For example, you were very quick to tell me to get back to work earlier, even though you know I go into town on this day every week to go food shopping. You've never quibbled over how long I've been gone before, so actually I was working."

"Was it all work when you left with my brother?"

"I didn't ask him to go with me, he wanted to. You were in your study writing. He was at loose ends."

"Did you have a good time?" he asked with a dead calm voice, eyes narrowed.

She didn't care for his tone. "Just what are you getting at? If you have a problem with me spending time with your brother, how about coming out of your damn study for more than five minutes? From what I gather, you two haven't seen each other in a few years and I think it's really shitty of you to leave him to his own devices like that. Don't jump down my throat just because you're a lousy host."

Thorne's face paled and Merry realized she'd gone too far. *Oh, boy. I've done it now. I'm going to be jobless and homeless right before Christmas.* "I'm sorry."

"No. Don't apologize. I deserved that. Actually, I came in here to beg your forgiveness."

Had she heard him correctly? He'd come to beg for her forgiveness? "Come again?"

"I wanted to say I'm sorry. I know I've been a little short with you lately. I don't want you to think that what you do around here isn't appreciated. I never even complimented you on the Christmas decorations you put up. They look great."

Merry felt shy all of a sudden, a small smile tilting her lips. It was hard to stay mad feeling for him like she did. "Thank you. Apology accepted."

"If I'd known you'd smile at me like that, I would have said I'm sorry sooner. You should do that more often. You have a great smile, Merry."

She was sure that her face would be beet red if she didn't have dark skin. His words were a far cry from devotion, but they made her heart do somersaults nonetheless.

"Thank you, Mr. Mordeaux -- umm, Thorne," she corrected herself when he lifted one dark brow.

"Now was that so hard?"

"No. I guess not."

"There was another reason I came to see you."

"What? Is there something else you'd rather have for dinner? The roast will keep for a few more days."

He seemed hesitant for a moment and Merry couldn't figure out why. "Thorne?" she prompted.

"Well, dinner was something I had in mind. Dax and I are going out for Chinese tonight and then to catch a movie. They're showing *A Christmas Story* in town."

"Oh, the one where the little boy wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas?"

Thorne smiled, revealing large white teeth. "Yes, that's the one."

"I love that movie. I'm sure you two will have fun."

"Well, that's the thing. I... we were hoping you'd join us."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

Because I wouldn't know how to stop myself from jumping on you. She felt a tingling between her legs. If she could barely control herself now, how would she act in a dark movie theater with him so close? "Well, I'm sure you'd like some alone time with Dax, and I don't want to intrude."

"You wouldn't be intruding if you're invited."

"Well --"

"Do you have any other plans?"

"No."

"Then it's settled. Put the roast up and we'll leave in an hour."

"What should I wear?"

"Dax and I are going as we are, jeans and a sweater, so it will be pretty casual. I'm sure whatever you wear will look fine."

Merry laughed nervously. "That's very nice of you to say."

"You sound doubtful."

She snorted derisively. "All I said was that it was nice of you to say."

"It's not what you said. It's the way you said it. I only speak the truth. Look. There's something I have to tell you." He paused, and she wondered why Thorne looked so uncertain all of a sudden.

"Tell me."

"I'm... I... what I'm trying to say is... damn." Thorne broke off, raking his fingers through his dark hair, turning his back to her.

Dax burst into the kitchen. "Thorne, did you ask her yet?"

"Yes. She'll come with us."

Dax turned a brilliant smile on her. "That's great. We'll have fun tonight."

So it had been Dax who'd put Thorne up to inviting her. He hadn't wanted her to come after all. The thought was crushing, but she couldn't back out without looking like a jackass. "Well, I'm going to put the roast up and then I'll get ready."

Merry went about wrapping up the roast to keep it fresh. Thinking she'd been left alone, she was surprised to see Thorne standing in the doorway of the kitchen, an unreadable expression in his eyes.

She jumped. "You need to stop scaring me like that," she laughed, walking toward him. When she made a move to go past him, he halted her.

"Surely you won't ignore tradition."

"What are you talking about?"

Thorne pointed to something over his head.

Mistletoe.

"But you can't --"

"Oh, but I can and I will."

Before Merry could utter another protest, Thorne bent down and brought his mouth to hers.

Chapter Five

Merry was having the time of her life. Since the night she agreed to go out to dinner with Thorne and Dax, her days were filled with a whirlwind of activity. They'd gone ice skating, where she fell on her behind on numerous occasions, to the movies, to the Space Needle, and they'd attended a few Christmas shows.

Dax constantly had her in stitches with his endless jokes, and his laid-back manner kept her at ease. Thorne was another story. He'd loosened up considerably, but there were times when Dax would leave them alone and neither she nor Thorne would speak. Her reason for not speaking was because she was afraid of letting him know her feelings. Why Thorne didn't talk was beyond her.

The odd thing was, she'd caught him staring at her on several occasions. There'd been no kisses since the stolen one in the kitchen, but it had remained on her mind. It had only been a slight brushing of his lips against hers, but it had set her on fire. No matter what happened to her in the future, Merry would always cherish that moment under the mistletoe.

Maybe it wasn't a good idea to spend so much time with Thorne because Merry found herself falling harder for him each day. She learned things about him that impressed her, like his sensitivity, wry humor, and the obvious closeness that he shared with his brother.

Every new facet of Thorne's personality only increased her feelings for him. She sighed, putting her book aside. There was no use reading it because she'd been on the same page for the past half an hour.

Thorne and Dax were downstairs playing chess, and she'd opted to come to her room and read, needing to get away from Thorne or go nuts with wanting him. Oddly, the more time she spent with Dax, the more attracted she became to him. She couldn't

put her finger on why, but last night she'd had a sexy dream about being the meat in a Mordeaux sandwich.

She pictured herself lying on her side with Thorne in front and Dax in back. Where the hell had that image come from? Things like that only happened in porno movies.

A light tap on the door broke Merry out of her reverie. She frowned, wondering if it was Thorne or Dax knocking. "Come in," she called, scrambling off her bed.

She smiled when Dax entered, glad it wasn't Thorne because she didn't know how she'd handle the situation if it were. To her surprise, he shut the door behind him and she wondered what he was up to.

"I hope you don't mind me intruding on your sanctuary." He gave her a large smile that lit up his entire face.

"Uh, no. Why should I mind, Dax? What can I do for you?"

"You have no idea," he muttered cryptically before stepping further inside the bedroom, not stopping until he was only a foot away from her. He had something behind his back.

"What are you holding?"

Instead of answering her question, Dax smiled. "Do you know what time it is, Merry?"

She glanced at the clock on her bedside stand. "It's midnight. Why?"

"It's Christmas. Merry Christmas." He produced a small gold gift-wrapped box.

She gasped, her eyes widening. She hadn't received a Christmas gift since she was a teenager. "For me? You didn't have to get me anything."

"I know I didn't have to, but I wanted to. Are you going to take it, or will you leave me standing here like a chump?"

"I'm sorry. I'll take it, thank you." Merry took the box from his hand and ripped the gold paper away to reveal a velvet box. When she opened it, she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Oh my God. Are these real?" Even as she asked the question, she knew they were. That sparkle was unmistakable. In the velvet box was a stunning pair of ruby and diamond earrings.

"They're very real. I thought they suited you."

"But... you hardly know me. I can't accept these."

"You can and you will, or else I'll be extremely insulted. Besides, I can afford it."

"They must be worth a fortune though."

"That doesn't matter. What does is whether you like them or not."

"Dax, I love them. But why would you give me such an extravagant gift?" She was sure most people would have graciously accepted them, but Merry had to know why.

Dax laughed. "Merry, hasn't anyone ever told you to just say thank you? They're a token of my esteem. Can I sit down?"

"Of course." She inclined her head in consent.

Instead of taking one of the seats lined against the wall, Dax sat on the bed. What he said next took her by surprise. "Have you and Thorne talked yet?"

"About what?"

"About his past, about his family, his... traditions."

She frowned, furrowing her brow. "No. Why would we?"

"Sheesh, I think you two have to be the dimmest bulbs in the box."

"Hey, wait a minute!"

"I'm not trying to insult you but I find it hard to believe two seemingly intelligent people can be so dense."

"You may not be trying to insult me, but you're doing a pretty damn good job of it."

"Fine. I'll say it in plain English. Thorne is crazy about you, and judging from the way you react when I mention his name, his feelings are reciprocated."

The velvet box slipped out of her nerveless hands. "Excuse me?"

"He's in love with you, Merry, and I think you feel the same way. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out."

"You've got it wrong. Thorne doesn't see me like that."

Dax rolled his eyes heavenward. "Don't be an idiot. Of course he does, and he's felt that way from the first time he laid eyes on you."

Merry did the only thing she could think of. She laughed until she couldn't stop. She didn't see Dax approaching, but she felt him grab her arms and cover her mouth with his.

That shut her up. Too stunned to do anything other than stand against the ruthless assault of his mouth, Merry felt a stirring within. Oh God, he wasn't supposed to make her feel like this. Thorne was the one she wanted.

Merry tore her mouth away from his. "This is wrong."

"Why is it wrong? You want me and I want you too. It's okay to admit it."

"But you said it yourself. I want to be with Thorne. How could I want you too?"

"You're only sexually attracted to me, but you're in love with Thorne. Admit it, Merry, you've thought of having both of us at once."

Her face flamed. Were they actually having this conversation? "No, I can't be."

"But you are." He grabbed her hand and brought it to the bulge in his pants. Her hand trembled over the stiff ridge of his rock hard cock. Merry tried to pull away, but he kept her firmly against him.

"No, Dax."

"Yes, Merry," he whispered, pulling her closer to cover her lips again. He dug his fingers through her hair and held her firm while his tongue slid across the seam of her lips. A burst of lust swept through her body, and before she knew what had come over her, she wrapped her arms around his neck.

Dax lifted his head and trailed kisses along her jaw line. "You see. It's okay that you want me. It's natural. You want me because you love Thorne."

"That doesn't make any sense," she groaned when he lowered his hands down the length of her back and squeezed her ass.

Just then the door burst open. "Damn it, Dax, you didn't waste any time, did you?" Thorne stormed into the room, eyes blazing.

Merry pushed against Dax's chest to free herself, but he held her firm. "I warned you, little brother. You had until Christmas. It's now officially Christmas."

"What's going on here?" Merry demanded, finally able to wiggle out of Dax's arms.

Thorne walked over to her. "There's something I need to tell you. I think you should have a seat."

* * *

Thorne left nothing out, telling Merry everything from his true identity to his people's customs. He'd even demonstrated his powers when she snorted in disbelief. And finally, he confessed his feelings for her.

She sat on the edge of the bed with her jaw practically on the floor. Dax sat in a chair across the room from them, nodding in approval. Maybe he shouldn't have told her all at once. She looked like she was going to faint. "Merry?"

She shook her head, as if trying to wake herself up. "Am I dreaming? I must be because I don't think I heard you right, and I definitely didn't see it snowing in my room."

"You're not dreaming. This is all very real."

"You're actually in love with me and have been from the beginning?"

That question threw him off. He'd expected her to question his Darwaedd heritage. He walked over to where she sat and knelt down in front of her. She gnawed on her lower lip. Thorne wanted to taste those lips again. The brief kiss under the mistletoe hadn't been enough. "Yes. I've had feelings for you from the moment I laid eyes on you."

"Then why have you been so nasty to me these past few days?"

"Because I was jealous as hell. I hated seeing you laugh and share things with Dax that you didn't with me."

"There's no need to be jealous. Dax is just a friend and that kiss... I wished it was you."

His pulse raced at her admission. "Do you mean it?"

"Of course I meant it. I just never thought you could love someone like me."

"What do you mean, someone like you?"

"Well, you can probably have any woman you want."

"I don't know about that, but the only woman I want is you. I'm thirty-six years old. Don't you think I'm old enough to know my own heart? I've been in love once before, but it didn't fill me with this deep aching need that keeps me up at night, wanting and burning for you. Just seeing you pour my coffee every morning, not being able to touch you, has nearly driven me out of my mind."

She touched his cheek. "Thorne, I don't know what to say."

"Say you'll be mine."

"Does it really need to be said when you already know how I feel?"

"I want to hear the words."

"I love you," she whispered.

Tears sprang to his eyes. Those words probably made him the happiest man in the world. Then something came to mind. "Merry, about the other stuff --"

"You mean about not being human?"

"Half human actually, but yes. Are you okay with that?"

"I would love you if you were a green alien with horns. Though your looks are a plus, I think I fell in love with who you are on the inside."

"And the other stuff about Dax?"

She lowered her hand, eyes downcast. "Well, for a while I was worried about why I was attracted to him when it was you I wanted. At least I understand, now. If it's a cultural thing, I guess I'm going to have to get used to it just like you'll have to get used to eating black-eyed peas and chitlings on New Year's," she giggled.

"I think I can handle that." He grinned. "We'll make this pleasurable for you, but I have to ask... is this your first time?"

"I'm not a virgin if that's what you mean, but I've never had a threesome before."

Thorne nodded. He was pleased at how well Merry seemed to be taking it. In the Darwaedd culture, the head of the family welcomed new brides into the family with copulation, usually performed with the bridegroom in attendance. It was up to the woman whether she wanted both men at once. From the look in Merry's eyes, Thorne already knew the answer. "Are you sure you're ready for this?"

"As ready as I'll ever be." She cupped his face and pulled his head down to hers.

His dick shot to attention at her show of eagerness. Her lips were soft and warm. His tongue snaked out to sample their lush fullness. He could still taste the faint remnants of the cherry cheesecake she'd eaten for dessert mixed with a sweet merlot. She was delicious. "Open your mouth for me, Merry," he muttered against her lips, wanting to explore all of her.

Thorne silently vowed to make this a Christmas she wouldn't soon forget.

Chapter Six

Thorne did what he'd been dying to do for a long time; he ran his fingers through her short tight curls. He loved the feel of their soft texture. His tongue slid past her lips, circling the inside of her mouth, tasting every nook and cranny.

He'd never felt so hot from just a simple kiss. It filled him with new sensations he'd never experienced before. She felt so good -- so right. Merry moaned into his mouth, releasing her sweet fragrant breath. An overwhelming hunger rushed through his body, threatening to tear him apart. "I don't think I can get enough of you," he groaned, pulling back slightly to look into her passion glazed eyes.

Thorne didn't know how much longer he could go without her touching him. He needed her hands on his bare skin. He pulled her off the bed to her feet and guided her hands to his chest. "Undress me," he commanded.

She wasted no time undoing the buttons on his shirt. With each one undone, her pinky grazed his skin, making his body tremble in reaction. He closed his eyes, a frantic fluttering in his chest.

Her hands shook against him and her moves seemed hesitant. She was no seductress, but Merry's touch set him on fire more than any skilled temptress could. He thought he'd lose his mind when she pressed a kiss against his bare chest. "You have a beautiful body, Thorne. You're so muscular and firm."

She ran her fingers over his nipples, grazing the bronzed tips. Merry leaned forward and took one hard peak into her mouth, whirling her tongue around it.

He held her head against his body, grinding his cock into her. "That feels so good. You're going to be the death of me. Where the hell did you learn how to do that?" he moaned.

She didn't answer, merely winking up at him before transferring her attention to his other nipple, giving it the same treatment. She teased the aching peak until he pleaded for mercy.

She lifted her head with a tantalizing smile. "Did you like that?"

"Need you ask? That was hot."

"Then maybe you'll like this too," she answered before going down to her knees.

Thorne's breath caught in his throat in anticipation of what was to come. The thought of his cock in her mouth was nearly more than he could bear, but he didn't want her to feel pressured into something she didn't want to do. It touched him that she wanted to please him though. "Merry, you don't have to do this you know," Thorne groaned.

Her head shot up, her dark brown eyes pools of inquiry. "I know I don't have to do it, but I want to. I've wanted to do this for a while. Now shut up and enjoy," she laughed. Merry made short work of unzipping his jeans and sliding them down his hips. He stepped out of them, his boxers following.

"Your cock is so thick," she whispered, her voice full of wonder. Thorne gasped. The warmth of her breath brushed against his sensitive tip. Merry's tongue flicked out, grazing and circling it.

"Dear Lord," he muttered.

She opened her lips around him and began to slide the length of his dick deeper into her mouth until the head hit the back of her throat. He knew his cock was larger than average, so it surprised him that she could get so much of it inside her mouth. Thorne braced himself, fighting the urge to thrust forward. Merry cradled his balls in her hands as her head bobbed back and forth over his cock.

The sensation of her hot wet mouth sent shockwaves of burning lust down his spine. "Merry, Merry, Merry," he called out, grasping the sides of her head, gently guiding her over his erection.

"Mmm," she moaned around him, her hands fondling the sensitive flesh between his legs. Her lips tightened around him and Thorne didn't think he'd be able to

handle this exquisite torture much longer. For someone without a lot of experience, she seemed to know just the right way to touch him. Still, her innocence was obvious with the hesitant touches and soft sighs of wonder. She squeezed his balls a little too tightly, making him grunt.

Merry tore her mouth away from his cock. "I'm sorry," she said, looking up at him with a pretty pout on her lips.

"It's okay, darling."

"Let me kiss it and make it better." Before he knew what she was up to, Merry pushed his cock against his stomach and hunched lower on her knees.

"Damn, that feels good," he moaned when her lips touched his throbbing sack. She sucked his balls into her mouth, sending a rippling sensation through his groin. Thorne realized he would explode any second now if she continued on this path.

Unable to take any more, he pulled Merry to her feet. His mouth captured hers in a hungry assault. He cupped her face in his hands, deepening the kiss. He couldn't get enough of her and didn't want to. So many nights he'd wake in a cold sweat after imagining how it would be with her.

There were so many days when he'd sit in front of his computer not typing a damn word for thinking of Merry. His mind was constantly filled with images of her lush chocolate body. But now she was truly here with him, and the reality far outweighed any of his wildest imaginings. "I can't stop kissing you, Merry. I love you so much. I can't believe you're real."

She smiled up at him. "I think that's my line. We've probably shared the same dreams."

"As touching as this scene is, I think perhaps you have us at a disadvantage, Merry. I think it's time we got you out of these clothes," Dax said, walking over to them, stark naked.

A hand gripped Merry's shoulder. Dax. In her absorption with Thorne she'd nearly forgotten his presence. She stiffened, feeling nervous for what was to come.

"This can't be right," she whispered a faint protest.

"According to whom? The human world? This is part of our culture. Didn't you say you were ready to accept me, warts and all?" Thorne bent down to nibble at the corner of her lips.

"I am, but you won't mind?"

"That you enjoy Dax's touch? It would be unrealistic of me to expect you not to. Relax, Merry. Give in to your desires." Thorne gave her a gentle kiss, coaxing her lips apart with his tongue.

She squirmed, feeling a hot tingling sensation between her legs. Already her panties were moist. Dax pulled her against his body and slid his hand beneath her blouse, grabbing her breasts. If this was wrong, why did it feel so right? Diligent fingers squeezed her nipples through her bra, drawing gasps and moans from her throat.

Thorne unbuckled her belt and undid her pants, sliding them down her hips. "Lift your feet," he instructed. She stepped out of her pants, and then repeated the process with her panties. The look in her beloved's eyes made her shiver. His knuckles brushed the side of her hips. "Beautiful," he whispered.

His fingers rubbed the top of her pussy before pushing her legs apart so that he could cup her hot sex. "Oh, Thorne," she groaned in delight. The double stimulation of large hands fondling her breasts and another hand holding her wet mound made her weak with desire.

Merry leaned against Dax for support, tilting her head back, allowing his kisses along her jaw line. His lips felt nice against her skin. These two gorgeous men awakened the wild passion that had lain dormant inside of her, a passion she hadn't realized she was capable of. "Please, Thorne," she begged.

"What do you want? Tell me, Merry." He looked at her with unmistakable lust in his eyes.

"I want to feel your fingers inside me."

"Like this?" Thorne rubbed his index finger along her damp slit before pushing it between her labia. Her knees went weak when he touched her clit. If Dax hadn't been holding her so firmly, she was sure she'd fall.

She lifted her arms and twined them around the blond's neck as he continued to plant kisses on her heated skin, all while rubbing her breasts. It was hard to concentrate when they were both driving her wild with desire.

"Let's remove this, shall we?" Dax lifted her blouse up and yanked it over Merry's head. Her breasts sagged heavily when he undid her bra and tossed it aside.

She suddenly felt self-conscious about her body. What must they think of all her lumps and rolls? When she made a move to cover her chest, Dax pulled her arms down. "Don't cover your beautiful body. That would be a shame." He lifted the large mounds in his palms as though weighing them.

Thorne's head popped up, giving her a smile of encouragement. "He's right. You're gorgeous. You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. I love you, and I find everything about you fascinating, Merry." To prove his point, he kissed her belly and slipped a finger into her wet cunt.

"Oh, God," she yelped.

Thorne pressed his lips against the nest between her legs. Dax rolled her nipples between his fingers and thumbs, and Merry couldn't keep still. The deliciousness of the moment was just too much to handle.

She turned her head to meet Dax's seeking mouth. His kiss was hot and fervent, demanding everything but giving so much back in return. Their tongues danced to the erratic beats of their hearts.

Merry whimpered when another finger slid into her pussy. Her juices wet the inside of her thighs. The way these two men touched her body made her forget all about her hang-ups. Her inhibitions faded away and it seemed as though her body was floating on a tumultuous wave of bliss that she didn't want to end.

She bent her knees, taking Thorne's fingers to the hilt. "That's it, Merry, ride my fingers, baby," Thorne ordered, his voice hoarse with passion. Dax's grip tightened

around her as he guided her onto his brother's hand. She moved up and down with slow fluid motions.

This was nothing like the clumsy fumbblings of her high school days with Terrell. There had only been a few awkward kisses and unskilled caresses followed by a painful conclusion. Merry had cried after losing her virginity, not just from the physical or emotional pain, but from the lack of fulfillment.

No. This was something more.

Thorne increased the pressure of his probing fingers. Merry cried out, thrashing her head back and forth against Dax's chest, getting closer to one explosive peak. Their fingers on her breasts and cunt, kneading, pulling, probing, thrusting, and fucking, drove her wild with desire. It was only when Thorne's lips latched onto her clit that she scream out her release. "Oh, God! Yes! Yes!" She ground her pussy against his face, his fingers still deeply imbedded inside her. Her inner thighs were soaking wet from Thorne's mouth and her come.

Dax's mouth nipped the sensitive skin at the side of her neck. She was sure his teeth would leave a mark but didn't care -- it felt sensational. She enjoyed the feel of his solid body pressed against her back. "Oh, dear Lord, I don't think I can take anymore," Merry groaned.

Thorne pulled his head away from her pussy and looked up. "We're just starting." A wicked grin split his handsome face. She was mesmerized as he held her gaze, sliding his fingers from her and standing up. To her surprise, he rubbed his dew-drenched fingers across her bottom lip, wetting it before inserting the digits into his own mouth. "Mmm, you taste delicious. Taste her, Dax."

Dax released her breasts and turned Merry's head just enough so their lips could meet. She shivered when he trailed his tongue along her moist bottom lip. He took his time as though sampling a fine wine. "You're right, little brother, she's absolutely delicious."

Merry knew she'd faint from pleasure overload if these two kept this up. Dax captured her lower lip between his teeth, nibbling on it until she groaned. "Please," she begged, not really sure what she was begging for as she tore her mouth away.

"Tell us what you want," Thorne prompted, forcing her to say the words.

"I... I." She shook her head.

"You want us to fuck you. Say the words. You want our cocks in your ass and pussy, screwing you until you can't walk," Thorne said, his eyes never wavering from hers.

Merry nodded.

"Say it," Dax whispered in her ear, circling her throat with his hand.

"I want to be fucked. I want your cocks in my pussy and ass." Was that really her voice? She couldn't believe those words had actually escaped her lips.

"Ask and you shall receive." Thorne brushed his lips against her cheek. He led her to the bed. Thankfully it was large enough to accommodate the three of them. Her body quivered with anticipation, her deepest darkest fantasies on the verge of being fulfilled.

She couldn't remember a time when she'd wanted something as much as she wanted their cocks inside her. As she lay on the bed waiting for them to make the next move, she studied their perfect bodies. Standing side-by-side, large thick cocks jutting forward, it was like staring at two perfect works of art. Their bodies were toned, rippled masses of muscle and broad shoulders.

They both had a sprinkling of hair dusted over their chests the same color as the hair on their heads. She was slightly concerned about being able to accommodate their size, but for now her body was so hot Merry was past caring. She pulled herself up on her elbows when they made no move to join her. "What are you two waiting for? I doubt this pussy is going to get any wetter," she teased, feeling bold all of a sudden. Merry arched her back, her nipples jutting forward enticingly.

Thorne slid on the bed with a groan, covering her body. He ravaged her mouth with his, claiming her, taking her breath away. She eagerly wrapped her arms around

him, reveling at the feel of his flesh against hers. This was what she'd dreamed of for so long. Her heart threatened to overflow with love and lust for Thorne.

He stroked her hair while placing kisses on her neck. It was only when she heard the opening and closing of the door that she remembered Dax. "Where..." Her brows knitted in confusion.

"He'll be back." Thorne cut her off with his lips. Their hands ran over one another's bodies. She only hesitated for a moment when his knee nudged her thighs apart. Thorne knelt between her legs, holding on to them. "Are you ready, honey?"

"Yes. Fuck me, Thorne. Don't keep me waiting any longer."

He guided his cock against her slit, rubbing it along the swollen folds. She gasped, feeling scorched from the inside by the fire he'd ignited. His fingers parted her pussy lips before he thrust forward. She moaned, tightening her muscles around his cock.

"You're so tight. Damn. I'm not going to last very long if you continue to do that." Thorne stilled himself, obviously allowing her to adjust to his size, but Merry had other ideas.

She lifted her hips, forcing him to move as she climbed to the heights of ecstasy. He rocked against her, his hands holding her thighs apart. Merry was so caught up in the blissful sensations coursing through her body that she didn't notice Dax's return until she felt the bed dip to signal his presence.

Thorne fell on top of her and in one swift movement pulled Merry onto her side, his cock never leaving her sopping cunt. Dax settled behind her and she froze when he parted her ass cheeks. He pressed kisses on her back. "Relax, Merry. I only went to get some lube to make this easier for you."

She looked imploringly at Thorne. Seeing the love shining in his eyes, she relaxed. She knew he wouldn't allow anything to harm her. She unclenched her muscles, gasping when she felt something cold and wet touch her anus.

"It's just lube," Dax assured her. "I wouldn't dream of fucking your virgin ass without it. You have a lovely ass by the way, large and round -- perfect for riding." He added another dollop of lube before rubbing the tight bud with his thumb.

Merry buried her face into Thorne's chest when a probing finger slid inside her ass. Dax took his time working it into her, making her slick and ready for his invasion. Another finger joined the first and she found herself groaning, not in discomfort but from pleasure.

"Are you ready for my cock, Merry?" Dax brushed his lips against her ear. "Your ass feels ready. It's going to be so tight. I'm ready to burst just thinking about it."

She forced herself to relax when his cock thrust forward. "Oh God! Oh God! Take it out!" she cried, pushing back against him, but that only served to drive him deeper into her ass.

Tears streamed down her face. This hurt! She couldn't think for the life of her why she'd imagined anal sex would be enjoyable.

Thorne cradled her head. "Relax. It's your first time, honey. I know there'll be discomfort at first. Let your body adjust."

"I won't move until you say so, Merry," Dax confirmed.

Thorne and Dax ran their hands over her body, leaving no inch untouched, slowly getting her to relax while taking her on a journey of mind blowing sensations until the pain was a distant memory.

"Are you ready, Merry?" Thorne asked, kissing her on the nose.

She nodded, bracing herself for the onslaught of two cocks moving inside her. Dax moved first, grinding against her in a slow steady motion. Then Thorne drove his dick into her pussy, matching his brother's pace.

A billowing wave of lust tore through her body, slamming her into an ocean of rapture. Merry gripped Thorne's shoulders, whimpering in pleasure.

"Don't hold back, Merry. Scream for us, moan for us," Dax ordered, speeding up, his cock pounding into her ass, which seemed to signal Thorne to pick up the pace as well.

Merry didn't know if they would tear her apart with the frantic, violent motions of their cocks, slamming into her hungry holes, but she didn't care. This felt too damn good. *Valentine, eat your heart out*, she thought. Her sister couldn't possibly be having as much fun as she was right now.

Merry had once been told that things happened for a reason. Now she knew it was true. If Valentine hadn't basically kicked her out, she wouldn't be here experiencing the most delicious sensations.

Hard cocks slammed into raw, wet flesh until Merry reached a peak so intense she screamed.

When she recovered her senses, the Mordeaux brothers were still fucking her like men possessed. Merry knew for sure she'd have trouble walking after this. Another raging orgasm swept through her body. "Oh God!" she cried, her nails tearing into Thorne's skin.

Dax leaned his sweaty forehead against her neck before he exploded into her ass. Thorne's seed burst into her pussy a few seconds later, and they all lay panting and spent after their cataclysmic joining.

Several moments passed before Dax eased his semi-erect penis from her ass and turned her onto her back, Thorne's dick popping out of her as a result. Dax kissed her on the mouth and lifted his head, a smile in his pale eyes. "Welcome to the family, Merry Christmas Holiday."

Epilogue

Daylight seeped through her window. It had been hours since Dax had left them alone. Merry's arms were wrapped around Thorne's neck as his cock moved within her, pressing her body into the mattress. She'd hardly gotten any sleep last night, but she didn't mind. Sleep would come later. Right now she wanted to be held by this man who made her heart pound like no other.

"I can't believe we're still at this," she giggled.

"What can I say? We have a lot of lost time to make up for." His lips brushed the side of her neck.

She sighed. "Oh, I like that."

Thorne smiled. "You do? Then let me do it again." He lowered his head and repeated the kiss.

"I think I could get used to this."

"You'd better because you're going to get a lot of it. Merry Christmas, my darling."

"It is Christmas, isn't it? I nearly forgot. I have a present for you. It's not much, but I hope you like it." She moaned when he continued to move inside of her with long leisurely thrusts.

"You didn't have to get me anything. Your love is gift enough." He moved over her, his braced arms holding him up. Merry wrapped her legs around Thorne's hips, feeling an overwhelming sensation of love for this gorgeous hunk.

"Oh, Thorne, I love you so much," she declared as he led her to a shattering peak, her love intensifying that feeling. His seed shot up her cunt as he yelled his release. Thorne collapsed and pulled her into the crook of his arm.

"That was wonderful. Do you think it will always be that way between us?" she asked, kissing his chest.

"As long as my heart beats, it will. I love you, Merry." He grasped her chin, tilting her head until their lips met.

Thorne's words were touching. "You say the most beautiful things. I wish it hadn't taken so long for the two of us to realize how we felt for each other." She sighed with regret.

"Me too. I was sure you wouldn't want me. I was so afraid of rejection that I withdrew into myself."

"I felt the exact same way. What a couple of idiots we've been."

Silence fell between them and she was content to lie in his arms just listening to the beat of their hearts.

"Merry?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"About Sayrea..."

She lifted her head to look him in the eyes. "You want to go back, don't you?"

"Only for a visit right now, but who knows how I'll feel when we get there? How do you feel about that?"

"I go where you go. You're not going to get rid of me that easily, buddy," she laughed. "Oh, I forgot your Christmas gift."

"Merry, I don't need a Christmas gift. I have you."

"So, I got you one anyway." She climbed out of bed and retrieved the painting from her closet. "Sorry it's not gift wrapped. I thought this would look nice in your study."

Thorne sat up and looked at the landscape painting. He gasped. "This looks like Sayrea. Where did you get this?"

"I bought it at an art gallery downtown. I was drawn to it and it made me think of you."

"I love it. Thank you." He kissed her to show his appreciation. "I have something for you too. Look on your dresser."

"How did you sneak a present in here?"

"You did doze a couple times."

She slid out of bed again and raced over to her dresser to see a smaller black velvet box sitting next to the one Dax had given her. "What is it?"

"Open it up and find out, silly." He grinned at her, looking pleased with himself.

Merry's eyes nearly bugged out of her head when she saw the most exquisite emerald cut diamond. It had to be at least five carats. Rubies and diamonds adorned the band. "Thorne, is this what I think it is?" She turned around to find him standing next to her in all his naked glory.

"Yes. I hope you like it."

"Are you kidding? I love it. Oh, my God, it's huge. It matches the earrings Dax gave me. You two had this planned, didn't you?"

"Dax set the wheels in motion sooner than I'd have liked but I'm glad he did. I've had this ring for a long time actually. He must have done a little snooping, the nut." His lips twisted in a wry smile.

"We owe him a lot, don't we?"

"More than I can put into words. Here, let me put this on you."

Her hand trembled as he slid the ring on her finger. Merry didn't know if they would end up here or Sayrea, but wherever Thorne went she'd follow. Her heart was now complete.

This was turning out to be the best Christmas ever.

The End

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn has enjoyed creating characters, and making up stories from an early age. As a child she was always getting into mischief, so when she lost her television privileges (which was often), writing was her outlet. Eve likes to read, bake, make crafts, travel, and spend time with her family. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and pet turtle. She loves hearing from her fans, so feel free to contact her at EveVaughn@yahoo.com or join her yahoo group by sending an email to evevaughnsbooks-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.